

## Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art, philosophy and psycho-analysis –  
<https://inscriptions.tankebanen.no/>

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**Author:** Inscriptions

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**Correspondence:** Inscriptions, e: [inscriptions@tankebanen.no](mailto:inscriptions@tankebanen.no).

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## Editorial

The publishing landscape for academic writing and research has become a highly monopolised and generously subsidised field, where the five main vendors have profit margins of up to 40 per cent, far beyond what would be expected in most other sectors of the economy. *Inscriptions*, a small, scholar-led journal on the far outskirts of this multi-billion industry is one of a limited number of initiatives that seeks to provide an alternative to the mainstream. However, there are several pitfalls when we try to move beyond the current stasis.

What we have today is the result of a rapidly shifting academic publishing environment the last decades. The current landscape is the culmination of trends that began with the escalating deregulation of public sectors from the late 1990s. While universities outsourced their publishing arm in line with the emerging dogma of deregulation and New Public Management a few dominant publishing houses seized on the opportunity to swiftly achieve a oligopolistic market situation through mergers and acquisitions and other strong-arm policies. Today only five publishers control about 75 per cent of the academic market: Wiley-Blackwell, Springer Nature, Elsevier, ACS and Taylor & Francis.

With the emerging oligopoly these publishers took the opportunity to radically increase subscription fees to their most coveted journals. Today top journals can cost over €3,600 per annum. The weight this made on university libraries engendered a revolt in the 1990s, the so-called *serials crisis*. Further, the public started to question the obvious contradiction that research they had paid for over their tax-bill could only be accessed by paying exorbitant fees to private publishers. This culminated in the Open Access movement, which had as its precursor the *arXiv archive* for physics preprints from 1991.

When CERN organised their first Open Archives workshop in 2001 the ground was prepared for a more comprehensive approach to open access, including common standards for academic publishing in the open domain. When the European Union decided to address this issue their main purpose was to ensure that universities and the public would retain access to research they had themselves funded. This goal came to outflank was given priority over combating the escalating costs of academic publishing. The resulting Plan S-initiative sought to ensure that academic publications remain public access. However, as it does not address the structure of the publishing market, the big five seized on the opportunity to make universities and authors pay the cost of open access. Today the major journals and their publishers will only allow a paper to be freely accessible if authors have payed a fee (often referred to as a submission or publication fee) that is supposed to off-set the reduced income the big five might have from subscriptions. The result is that while universities and the public in many instances have open access to research, the costs for the public has increased. A recent study found that expenditure for academic publishing in the social sciences ran up to a quarter of the entire public funding for the field. In other words, what we have is a heavily subsidised market oligopoly in the field of academic publishing.

What is the reason scholars and universities continue to select journals from the “big five” to publish their research when they know how expensive such a solution is to the public purse? Much of the answer lies in the discredited idea of Journal Impact Factor. Many of the biggest academic institutions uses it as an index to assess their professors. However, in reality this was an index calculated by Thomson Reuters not to measure the quality of research in an article,

but as a tool for librarians to identify which journals they should consider to purchase. Today there is a growing awareness of the limitations and outright flaws in this index, and many institutions, including the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester, Jyväskylä, and Syracuse, recommend that it not be used to assess research quality. The signatories to The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (Dora) notes that the Journal Impact Factor furthers a skewed distributions of citations, it can be manipulated (“gamed”) by clever publishers, and its the secretive character makes decisions grounded in it opaque and and one-sided.

This open issue of *Inscriptions* demonstrates how rigorous and exciting research *is* possible outside the “big five” academic publishing machine, and how this kind of grounded, thoroughly reviewed scholarship can be made available to the public with a completely different model than then one dominant today. This issue features texts that explore the form of the academic essay, such as the contributions from David Ritchie and Julio Alcántara, as well as essays that question the role of art in political processes (María Paula Suárez) and in trajectories of personal becoming (Shannon A.B. Perry). While poetics, in the ancient sense of a treatise on aesthetics, is the key component in the essays by Gorica Orsholits and Adam Staley Groves, Timothy Deane-Freeman introduces the categories of inscription, signification, and symbolic semiotics from the work of Félix Guattari, arguing that they constitute an original and often overlooked politics of signs, and Avron Kulak reads Kierkegaard and Descartes as a way to make us reconsider the distinction between reason and faith, arguing that existence can only be a matter of faith or reason in so far as it is both at the same time.

The growth of *Inscriptions* both in terms of readership and in the sheer volume of our contribution to this cross-disciplinary endeavour vouches for the viability of projects outside the dominant oligopolistic publishing establishment. Support us by reading, submitting, or subscribing to our print edition.

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